"This is London, How d'ye Like it?": Teaching the Streets in Eighteenth-Century London

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It is widely known that the lapse of the licensing act in 1695 had a profound impact on the state of the emerging literary marketplace in eighteenth-century England. Among the many effects of this "lapse" a few of the most well-known were the enormous increase in master printers, the further construction of an advertising system that included the provincial presses, changes in copyright law, and a move to subscription publication.[1] It is also arguable that this parliamentary failure contributed to the formation of the grub-street hack so decried by Alexander Pope and generally allowed for a proliferation of print unlike any seen in England up to this point. If it's possible to take a cursory glance at Eighteenth-Century Collections Online (which, of course, it isn't) even the most unacquainted reader will note the sheer amount of text. From the highly touted poetic specimens of Alexander Pope, to the novels of Daniel Defoe, to the criminal biographies of James Dalton and Charles Hitchin, to the sexual frolics of Fanny Hill, to Samuel Butler's *Dildoidies*, to the sodomy trials of John Dicks, George Kedger, and Thomas Rodin (to name only three of many), to the "news" stories of women giving birth to rabbits, to, finally (although I could go on), a treatise on women's "tails" affectionately entitled *Bumography* it is clear that no subject was off limits and, even more importantly, these subjects were being read by a voracious reading public. The lapse of licensing, in other words, played a tremendous role in constructing eighteenth-century British Literature as we know it today. All of this said, it is not

the purpose of this essay to reconstitute a historical narrative of print culture that has been assessed and re-assessed by some the most accomplished scholars in our field (nor would I dare attempt it). Instead, I ask what appeared to me a few years ago a rather simple question, but has become extremely difficult to attend to: what, as instructors of arguably the most robust period in English Literature, do we do with all of this text?

In my time as a student and professor, I have had the pleasure of participating in and teaching numerous courses devoted to a study of eighteenth-century Literature. Most courses, except for the sophomore level "Introduction to British Literature" tended towards thematics. From more generalized courses on the culture of print, to specific courses on the family, sex, and marriage, I have been lucky enough to engage a large body of eighteenth-century texts that drew from diverse fields. However, as one would expect, most of this work was done at the graduate level when I and my colleagues were already professional students and scholars in training (a state to which I sometimes long to return). As a professor at an undergraduate, liberal arts institution, I have been, and will continue to be, tasked with teaching the eighteenth century to undergraduates who have very little experience with the period and who will likely never engage it again after my course. This being the case, my first syllabi appear to me tentative, shy representations of the period. These courses were not in themselves deficient in terms of content; I introduced the students to the frolics of the restoration stage, the terror of the Great Fire, the joys of amatory fictions, and the "news" of the period. In these courses, they had the chance to read material from Rochester, Defoe, Pope, Haywood, and Richardson. However, these early courses appear to me now to have suffered from problems of cohesion. It wasn't that the students

were disinterested (although one student wryly remarked that "Pamela could have, and should have been, a short story") but that the students were not able to make the connections I thought readily apparent. In other words, what I saw as fluid shifts between text and context, they saw as a series of way points on a disjoined textual cartography. In light of these issues, and my stubbornness to believe that I was simply an ineffective teacher, I decided to do the obvious and better merge my pedagogy and research interests: out of which grew courses at multiple levels devoted to urbanity and the "rhetoric of loss." Concepts that are demonstrable through both central and marginal texts in the period.

However, this is not an argument about eighteenth-century canonicity. In my estimation, and one clearly articulated in John Guillory's *Cultural Capital* and re-investigated in Keegan and Haschenburger's *Questioning Canonicity,* one must buy into a canon before it can be accepted and/or dismissed. Keegan and Haschenburger mark a profound problematic for an instructor in any field of literary studies when they note that, "Historically social groups tended to privilege texts which represented their best ideas of themselves, but today's scholars must guard against that" (164). They go on to further argue that, "Even as the canon expands to include more minority authors, any canon (or any anthology that purports to materialize it) can only represent a minute fraction of all the texts created within any given period, and thus cannot be truly representative of that era's literary or moral values" (164). Claims such as these can have a profound impact on the approaches we take to both literary survey courses as well as upper-division period based courses. My goal has often been to represent the period as best I can in

sixteen weeks. If, as they claim, any attempt at authentic representation is doomed to failure then what is it, exactly, that I've been doing all these years?

I read the above material shortly before I stepped into my first (and hopefully last) tenure-track position at a small liberal arts college. That semester I was tasked with teaching the upper-division eighteenth-century literature course and I decided to radically change the way I approached the course. It wasn't that the previous course was necessarily deficient, but it certainly, at times, missed the proverbial mark. Students had difficulty making connections, coming to terms with the extremely complicated changes that England underwent during the long eighteenth century, and, of course, struggling with the texts themselves. As Dammers and Reitan note, "For many students today, literature and history prior to the twentieth century are difficult to comprehend" (92) just as they are for those of us who teach it. However, we can't ignore this simply because it is complicated, but perhaps we should engage in attempts of integrating this complicated history through texts that may be more accessible for students.

We all know that, in many ways, teaching this period is based on narrative contingency. In other words, for students to better engage texts such as *Joseph Andrews, Shamela, or Anti-Pamela* it is imperative that they struggle through Richardson's *Pamela*. In similar, but less direct fashion, to attend to the rise of the novel and narrative changes students need to engage in a prolonged and nuanced exposure to early formations of narrative and the changes it underwent through the period. I certainly questioned the efficacy of this approach, concerned with both the content and my ability to engage in this type of pedagogy. I decided on a thematic based course that attended to multiple issues I think important in the period. Because I am more familiar with

narrative articulations, as are my students, I decided to focus the course on women writers and women characters. One major and obvious issue with devoting a course in the eighteenth century to narrative is simply time. Beginning with excerpts from Aphra Behn's *Love Letters Between a Noble-Man and his Sister*, then moving to Manley's *Adventures of Rivella*, and then onto Haywood's *Love in Excess* provided a thorough foundation to discuss numerous historical issues through the lens of the emerging novel and the literary marketplace. Further, all of these texts are short enough to be read and discussed in one week's time (assuming Behn's text is excerpted appropriately). Everything from issues of gender and sexuality, to the complicated political machinations, to narrative formation were available for discussion. In some ways, this approach allowed almost too much discursive flexibility. The course continued with *Pamela* and then on to *Shamela* and pushed through to the end of the period. I saw in this course, as compared to the other, students paying closer attention to narrative and really struggling with the narrative difficulties inherent in texts like *The Adventures of Rivella* and *Pamela*. Of course, this could simply have been the group of students I had, but I have taught this course twice since then with similar results.

However, it is not the relative success of the course that I am interested in and concerned with, but instead my concerns were what was missing from a course like this. I understand that accurate representation will always be an issue in any period based course, especially one devoted to eighteenth-century narrative. However, my concerns are more specific. One particular example is my decision to have the students read period responses to Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess*. They responded very negatively to the famous excerpt from Pope's *Dunciad*. Similarly,

they found Pamela extremely annoying and Fielding's response particularly engaging. The students were "privilege[ing] texts which represented the best ideas of themselves." In other words, I had unwillingly positioned the class to fall into the trap that Keegan and Haschenburger noted. I don't think it possible to fully "guard" against this response from students. However, I do think it possible to use content and discussion to lead the class away from this response. Eighteenth-century narrative can, and often is, very jarring for students who have never been introduced to its playful nuance. The early years of narrative experimentation, the years of formula fiction, Defoe's journalistic style, etc. all contribute to a type of narrative alienation for students studying eighteenth-century literature. The response to this "alienation" (at least in my limited experience) has been to "pick sides" in various accounts. The consequence: they hated Pope, loved Haywood, found Pamela lacking genuine piety, and found Fielding's cavalier response particularly engaging. In these responses, I experienced exactly what Keegan and Haschenburger had claimed. I, unfortunately, had not led them to any "authentic" representation of eighteenth-century literary and moral values, but instead led them to what I now believe were incomplete and, at times, outright inauthentic understandings of narrative production which, in turn, led to misrepresentations of literary and cultural values. I had assumed an implicit importance to any text I assigned to students, and I do still believe that. Further, I had always assigned texts based on what I thought the students would glean from them. Instead of doing this, I decided to ask what is being represented in the texts I assigned. What I learned was that many texts conflate urbanity and a "rhetoric of loss" in an effort to understand the individual's "place" in a new metropolitan landscape.

The brief titular line of this essay is extracted from John Bancks' poem *A Description of London* in which he outlines the duplicitous life of London and those who inhabit the metropole. Each line of his poem groups together divergent items in an effort to demonstrate the lack of boundaries and restrictions, the loss of order, and the chaos of urban life:

> Houses, Churches, mix'd together;
>
> Streets, unpleasant in all weather;
>
> Prisons, Palaces, contiguous;
>
> Gates; a Bridge; the Thames irriguous (1-4).

In beginning with the architecture of the city, Bancks frames the contents of his poem as well as its form. Immediately noticeable is the rhetorical motion of the words and punctuation. Just as houses, churches, prisons, and palaces are all jumbled together in the urban landscape so, too, are the words. Using only commas to separate this architectural list makes the words themselves "contiguous." There is a division between the items on his list which has the paradoxical effect of bringing them rhythmically closer together. Also, the linguistic paucity and reliance on punctuation to connect these nouns produces a staccato effect that suggests Bancks finds this architectural "mix" troublesome. Brief and non-descript, the architectural make-up of the city clearly reflects its inhabitants.

While the city suffers from architectural chaos, the streets are inhabited by throngs of urbanites who are all "Showy Outsides; Insides Empty." Mixed among the urban crowds are "Lawyers, Poets, Priests, Physicians; Noble, Simple, all Conditions" (13-14). He also distinctly comments on "Rogues that nightly rob and shoot Men" and how "Villainy—bedaub'd all over."

For Bancks, urban inhabitants mirror their architectural surroundings. They are not simply "outside" the architecture and "Showy Outsides," but are instead urbanites that exist *in* the city and *with* the architecture. Everyone and everything that inhabits the city, whether buildings, "Coaches, wheelbarrows, carts," or thieves play some part in urban motion. The relationship of the people to their city is a complicated one where each inhabitant, whether noble or simple, handsome or ugly, has some part to play. The individual inhabitants are agents in defining their individual and distinct lived space as well as contributing to the momentum of the city. Footpads, in this case, are just as integral to the city as poets and physicians. Each has a role to play in constructing London as a city of both pleasure and pain, of both comfort and fear—a duality that is marked in the last stanza of the poem when he writes, "Many a Bargain, if you strike it:/This is London! How d'ye like it?" The final question only makes the previous conditional more forceful. The mixing of classes, buildings, and people produce a London that is conversely full of possibility; full of "bargains" but only if the urban individual is willing to "strike it." This further suggests that each inhabitant contributes to the production and perception of the city, and also that individuals, because of this chaos, control some aspects of both the city and their place in it.

I discuss Bancks' poem at length because it harkens back to what Cynthia Wall has aptly termed a "rhetoric of loss." This "rhetoric of loss" is clearly displayed in Both Pepys' and Evelyn's diary. John Evelyn, in his *Diary*, comments on how the fire has collapsed boundaries thus causing socio-economic as well as spatio-temporal confusion:

> Nor was I yet able to passé through any of the narrower streets, but kept the widest, the ground and aire, smoake and fiery vapour, continud so intense, my haire being almost seinged, and my feete unsufferably surbated: The bielanes and narrower streets were quite fill'd up with rubbish, nor could one have possibly knowne where he was, but by the ruines of some church, or hall, that had some remarkable towre or pinnacle remaining: I then went towards Islington, and high-gate, where one might have seene two hundred thousand people of all ranks and degrees, dispersed, and laying along by their heapes of what they could save from the *Incendium* (III: 461).

As the Fire still rages, Evelyn's account pinpoints the immediacy of "such visible social disintegration [that] haunts all immediate genres of the narrative account of the Fire" (Wall 11). His observations, however, also express the immediate immobilization and spatio-temporal confusion enacted by the Fire. His perambulations through the once familiar streets are now retarded. He is "[un]able to pass through…the narrower streets" and the streets were "fill'd up with rubbish." The architectural landmarks are now simply "some church, or hall." Moreover, class distinctions are now effaced in lieu of "two hundred thousand people of all ranks and degrees." For Evelyn, the familiar streets of London, the historical landmarks that define space, and the entrenched socio-economic distinctions all collapse so that the city and its inhabitants are only known by "what they could save."

Pepys, too, sees the effects of the Fire when he goes to the Exchange only to find "nothing standing there of all the statues or pillars but Sir Tho. Gresham's picture in the corner"

(VII: 276). He also notes of Moorfields that it is "full of people, and poor wretches carrying their goods there, and everybody keeping his goods together by themselves" (VII: 276). Pepys, like Evelyn, observes in the Fire not simply a loss, but a collapse of distinctions that once defined metropolitan life. The inhabitants of London defined stability through the possessions they attempted to maintain while the city was defined by one's motions in its streets and its architectural significance. The Fire hindered motion and consumed private goods thus throwing both individual and urban identity into confusion, estranging the city and its inhabitants. However, the reconstruction of London would help assuage the estrangement felt by its inhabitants. This was done through a redefinition of space in which urban mobility and civic responsibility define metropolitan space.

Thus, for Wall:

> The rhetorics of loss generated by the Fire, in official narratives, sermons, diaries, and poems, all share to some degree a heightened spatial consciousness in imagery and expression, an awareness of a new kind of conceptual emptiness in the ruined physical spaces, of boundaries previously invisible and now transgressed, of structures previously assumed and now collapsed, of spaces once fixed and stable, now shifting and treacherous (4).

The treachery of space in Wall's account destabilizes sign and signifier, which indicates a further destabilization of an individual, urban identity. Wall contends that inhabitants of post-Fire London were acutely aware of urban destabilization and its effects on urban identity. To her, "Too many distinctions seemed to collapse: the streets were closed, emptied of buildings and

refilled with rubble, their defensive chains melted; the privacy of houses, the sanctuaries of churches, the institutionalized spaces of the Company Halls, all alike were blown open and lost; rich and poor spilled homeless into Moorfields; the very fabric of urban and social meaning was undone into topographic incoherence" (6). The urban self, then, is similarly damaged in a Fire that, "destroyed four-fifths of the historical, commercial, topographic, and imaginative center of London" (5). The outcome of this topographical destruction is an explosion of literatures intent on redefining the streets of London and those who inhabit them. For those who inhabited London and those who wrote about the metropole, the effort was intended "to make *lived* space once again *known* space" (38).

In an effort to redefine and (re)know urban spaces in the early half of the eighteenth century, authors show "that Londoners well understood that it was not enough to recover the streets and reinstate street names; reinhabiting the new city demanded that the occupant also map that behavior" (Wall 117). There were numerous responses in various genres to the rebuilt city and one's (in)ability to navigate or map behavior in it. Oftentimes, these renditions suggest an urban ambivalence in which pleasure and success are tempered by a fear of what lies within the city. Wall notes this fear of London in direct relation to the Fire:

> Like the insistent public fear that the enemy was socially "within"—the catholics, the fanatics, those extremists amongst us—and the spiritual certainty that the Fire was God's judgment for the interior sins of the city, so many of the poems and Fire narratives reveal a lurking anxiety about the general interiority of fire,

> nurtured in our secret darkness, in a place where literal fact and psychological metaphor far too full overlap (33).

Early eighteenth-century authors feared the lurking footpad, the aggressive sodomite and the "pox't whore" for what they intimated about the dark spaces of urbanity. These criminal deviants became the focus for a slew of publications from John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* to Henry Fielding's *Enquiry Into the causes of the Late Increase in Robbers*. In these works and many others, London allows the civic minded and the criminal deviant spaces in which to blend and thrive. For the civic minded, the lighted streets of business and industry, and for the deviant, the darkened alleys and public houses of ill repute become areas of production no longer governed by immobilization, as they were for Evelyn and Pepys, but areas of action and mobility used for mapping virtuous behavior as well as vice.

There are far too many examples of urban behavioral cartography to enumerate here, however, there are a few examples throughout the first half of the century that highlight urban duality. In his essay, *Eighteenth-Century London: Urban Paradise or Fallen City*, Arthur Weitzman argues that, "feelings of fear and despair toward the city were anticipated by the writers whom we think of as the quintessence of cosmopolitan politeness: Pope, Swift, Gay, Fielding, and even Dr. Johnson in some of his moods. On the other hand, what one also finds among the Augustans is a real sense of an urban ideal, a heightened longing for a life possible only in the city" (469-470). The Scriblerian morality of Pope and Swift, although at times ambivalent, shows an overwhelming distaste for the city. For Pope, the ills of authorship directly correlate to the disintegration of aristocratic ideals and thus the city:

Time was, a sober Englishman wou'd knock
His servants up, and rise by five a clock,
Instruct his Family in ev'ry rule,
And send his Wife to Church, his Son to school.
To worship like his Fathers was his care;
To teach their frugal Virtues to his Heir;
To prove, that Luxury could never hold;
And place, on good Security, his gold.
Now Times are chang'd, and one Poetick Itch
Has seiz'd the Court and City, Poor and Rich
(*Imitations of Horace*, Ep. II, 161-170).

He would later ask in his *Imitations*, "And here, while Town, and Court, and City roars,/With Mobs, and Duns, and Soldiers, at their doors;/Shall I, in London, act this idle part?/Composing Songs, for Fools to get by heart? (Ep. II. ii, 123-126). Pope produces a "rhetoric of loss," as Cynthia Wall has outlined, which struggles to negotiate past glory and contemporary avarice. More specifically, however, Pope questions a similar loss of distinction between liberal author and Grub Street Hack, between the "Poor and Rich", between city, town, and court, and between "Mobs, and Duns, and Soldiers." In Pope's terms, London has become a city of unrefined action in which the use of the aggressive verb "seiz'd" intones that London and its inhabitants have been taken by vice both without their consent and completely unawares. Furthermore, to say that "one Poetick itch" has caused this calamity is to negate the numerous and necessary steps to a

productive urban life. In these terms, the public and the private lives of London's citizens are affected by idleness and a lack of virtuous activity necessary to regain London's glorious past. Also evident is that the "sober Englishman" is on the move. He moves fluidly between public and private lives in an ordered and ordering fashion.[2] His motion is rational, linear, and laden with purpose.

While Pope's vision is an intellectual foray in order to re-educate his readers, numerous comments on the city are much more tactile. For Jonathan Swift:

> Filth of all Hues and Ordours seem to tell
> What Street they sailed from, by their Sight and Smell.
> They, as each Torrent drives, with rapid Force
> From *Smithfield*, or St. *Pulchre's* shape their Course,
> And in huge Confluent join at *Snow-Hill* Ridge,
> Fall from the *Conduit* prone to *Holborn-Bridge*.
> Sweeping from Butchers Stalls, Dung, Guts, and Blood.
> Drown'd Puppies, stinging Sprats, all drench'd in Mud,
> Dead Cats and Turnip-Tops come tumbling down the Flood
> (*A Description of a City Shower*, 409-410).

The city in these lines is an amalgam of torrential smells and sights not one of which is appealing. The inhabitants are infected by the sights and smells of the streets from whence they came and contract the city as they walk through its streets past stalls and dead animals. However, it is not just the action of individuals in the city, but also the action of the city. While

inclement weather has produced the motion, the items in the streets and the smells that linger are urban productions and are only put in motion because they exist in the city. The city and its inhabitants produce these commercial by-products and the city must cleanse itself through a purification of water. The biblical assonance here equates London to a fallen city that must be purged, via the "flood," of those who live within its borders. Laura Brown, in her study *Fables of Modernity: Literature and Culture in the English Eighteenth Century*, demonstrates that the etymological and phonetic connection between "sewer" and "shower" shows that "Swift's poem leads in an inexorable rush—characteristic of the vitality of this figure—to the urban sewer" (27). She also notes that, "the sewer is a phenomenon that structures urban geography, tying the distant and socially disparate parts of the city to one network with the common necessary purpose of waste disposal" (28). This connection between urban inhabitants and urban waste is highly visible in other texts such as John Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe,* Alexander Pope's *Dunciad,* and John Gay's *Trivia; of the Art of Walking the Street*.[3] In these texts, the sewer/shower trope connects urban inhabitants, urban mobility, and urban waste to "the material degradation of city life" (Brown 26). Urbanites must always be moving if they are to avoid the waste that they helped produce. While Pope's masculine character moves seamlessly between public and private spheres as an effective husband, father and businessman, Swift's urban inhabitants are simultaneously affected by the city and affect the city itself in terms of urban pollution and human waste.

Other texts such as *A Trip Through Town, A Trip from St. James to the Royal Exchange, A View of London and Westminster; or The Town Spy*, *Hell Upon Earth,* and *Satan's Harvest*

Home similarly paint the city and its inhabitants as one in perpetual and often objectionable motion. Many of these authors also describe the city, as Weitzman has argued, in binary terms that represent a "fallen city" in need of cleansing and reconstruction. *A Trip from St. James to the Royal Exchange* (1744), for example, records an initial response to the city, its inhabitants, and its penchant for vice that is less than flattering:

> This Place [London] is a kind of large Forest of wild Creatures, ranging about at a venture, equally savage, and mutually destructive of each other. The splendid Equipages we see in every Part of the Town, are an indication of an approaching Poverty, and too plainly foretell Bankruptcy to Crouds of miserable People (B).

For this author, the motion of the city does not point to splendor and fascination, but instead to the brutality of urban life. The inhabitants of this London move about town as "savages" in order to destroy each other. Furthermore, the "splendid" means by which they traverse the streets of London marks them, paradoxically, as spendthrifts, thus highlighting fiscal abuses and impending economic disaster. Even more noticeable, however, is that this is happening in "every Part of Town." As is the case in much eighteenth-century figurations of identity, outside appearance says something very specific about identity. In this case, the "miserable people" are everywhere "savage" and everywhere irresponsible. In this scene, the way one moves about town indicates the way people live both their public and private lives. A spendthrift in private is a savage in public and one incapable of the civic-minded duties necessary to a highly functional mercantile culture.

The first lines of *Hell Upon Earth* (1729) also portray urban inhabitants and the city as "fallen." Between 6:00 and 7:00 Sunday morning, the author notices:

> Coaches, Chaises, Chairs, Phaetons, and Hackney Horses harnessing and getting ready for Citizens and their Wives, Doxies and Daughters.— Lascivious Gentlemen and Tradesmen stealing from their Maid Servants Garrets to their own Bed-Chambers.— *Irishmen* meditating the Destruction of Maids, Wives, Widows and Trades-People on their Pillows.— Infirm and superannuated Letchers plagued in their Beds with impracticable Desires.— News-Mongers *inventing* Stories of Rapes, Riots, Robberies, etc. for their next Papers.— Obscurity, Flatness and Impertinency flowing in upon the Meditations of certain Poetasters (2).

These "Observations of the Sabbath, in the good cities of London and Westminster" are obviously not "good" observations of a "good" city. Instead, these "Observations" further depict the city and its inhabitants in a state of constant and problematic motion. From the public street with its "Coaches" and "Chairs" to the private machinations of "Gentlemen," "Tradesmen," and "Irishmen," the city and its (male) inhabitants are constantly on the move. Just as the text shifts seamlessly between public and private criminal activity, the men committing the acts are "harnessing," "stealing," "meditating," and "inventing." The use of the present progressive tense in the above descriptions suggests that these activities are happening at the moment. This use positions urban motion and its connection to vice in a perpetual present. The men in the above

passage will *always* be scheming, will *always* be moving, and will *always* be using the city and its inhabitants for their malicious machinations.

Literary articulations such as those above are consistently recycled throughout the period. It is obvious from this brief literary history that many eighteenth-century authors were at least concerned if not obsessed with urbanity and the streets that comprised urban locales. It is not necessary to compile an exhaustive list of texts and authors who deal with urbanity and/or "rhetoric of loss" in any way. It is enough to note that everyone from Pepys, Evelyn and Bancks to Dryden, Swift, Pope, Gay, Cleland, Defoe and many, many others found this component of eighteenth-century life of particular importance to themselves and their readers. Further, there are legions of anonymous primary texts also concerned with eighteenth-century urbanity. It is not my intention here to question why all of these authors were so concerned with urbanity and its articulation in contemporary texts. My interest comes from the perspective of both an instructor and researcher of eighteenth-century literature and how this "street-level" obsession can be used to introduce students to the eighteenth century and how my scholarly fascination with "street-level" writing, often outside the scope of most eighteenth-century syllabi, has become an effective pedagogical approach to the period.

At the general level, this "street-level" lens through which we investigate eighteenth-century literatures has provided the cohesion I feel was lacking in earlier syllabi. Not only has this lens asked us to attend to descriptions and analyses of urban life, but has also afforded us the chance to trace transitions in these representations from both a multi-genre and a multi-discursive level. Further, introducing students to the investigation of eighteenth-century urbanity

opens up discussion to some of the most important topics of the era: issues such as political complexity, economics and the rise of the middle class, the private and public spheres, distinctions between city and country and natural and unnatural, the rise of the novel, and transitions in sexual mores all become available and fruitful objects of inquiry. Further, the primary texts through which we address the above issues are diverse, moderately representative examples of the proliferation of print. Students have the opportunity to read excerpts for the diaries of Pepys and Evelyn, the poetry of Pope and Swift, the narratives of Daniel Defoe, and John Gay's penny opera and excerpts from his *Trivia; or the Art of Walking the Street*. Just as important (in my mind at least) is that this lens give the students (and myself) the opportunity to read lesser known works that also attend to urbanity. Textual articulations of the sexual underworld in the early half of the century, and shorter, more accessible criminal biographies are extremely interesting to students and help to further demonstrate that both the liberal author and grub-street hack or the literary "have" and "have-nots" are all invested in the representation and reconstruction of urban identity and behavioral cartography.

The above literary scenarios offer, I think, a brief view of the ways London is configured by eighteenth-century authors. While these authors may have had slightly different conceptions of the city and how individuals affected it and were affected by it, there are consistent topoi in their renditions. Whether an individual author found the city distasteful and dangerous or exciting and tempting the common thread is always motion and space. The inherent question posed by authors such as Pope, Swift, and Bancks is how the urban subject interacts with such polymorphous surroundings. The city and its inhabitants are in perpetual motion, moving fluidly

between spaces, unraveling the dark corners and alleys of London while simultaneously being unraveled by them. For other urban authors like John Gay and Daniel Defoe, as well as the ones mentioned in this essay, the city, its streets, its locales, and its people all contribute to the production of urban space and urban identity.[4]

From a content perspective, eighteenth-century courses like all others suffer from the time constraints of the semester and the limited introduction our students tend to have of the period. Fourteen to sixteen weeks is certainly not enough time to give a comprehensive representation of eighteenth-century life and literature. However, the urban lens allows a relatively specialized approach to the period and access to many different authors and texts. Further, the students responded more positively to this thematic approach as they felt, as one student put it, that they were reading about the "real" people of eighteenth-century London. Using various short narratives such as those by Jonathan Wild and Charles Hitchin, novels such as *Moll Flanders*, various legal transcripts (which read as narratives), excerpts from diaries, poetry from authors like Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift, students often comment that they are "finding" London just as some of the characters in the texts we read. Instead of reading, as many students do, to get to the end of a text, many of my students were reading along with the text to, as one student put, "find out what Moll did next." While they were still attending mostly to plot, their end point for reading drastically shifted as we progressed through the semester. As one student eloquently put, "I had no idea that urban and commercial 'space' were also spaces of liberation and regulation." This observation led this particular student to other narratives and fruitful critical inquiry that led to fascinating essays. In the end, for many of them, they saw in

urban representations what Bancks saw in London, but they also saw the richness of urban literary articulations and, by extension, the diversity of eighteenth-century print.

John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, more affectionately known as Fanny Hill, was one of the final texts we read in a course devoted to eighteenth-century literature through the urban lens. One would certainly say that Cleland's text is not marginal and usually appears on syllabi devoted to the eighteenth-century novel and/or courses devoted to studies in gender and sexuality. Nonetheless, it is certainly a novel that the students are unfamiliar with and a novel they find shockingly attractive (don't we all?). My experiences were not unlike those of Kirsten Saxton, which she discusses in her essay, *Risking Fanny: Teaching Memoirs*. The novel's concerns place it strictly within the realm of academic study. As Saxton notes, and as I tell my students, Fanny Hill engages ideas of "domesticity, the construction of the male and female sexual subject, imperial expansion, the development of urban space, and the nature of fictional narrative itself" (335). However, what Fanny Hill engages the most is the students' imaginations. For instance, they immediately note that while they obliquely read about sex in Defoe, Haywood, Behn, and Fielding, they are reading explicitly about sex in this text. However, in regards to the thematic element of the course, they observe right away that Fanny's description and response to London and urban momentum greatly alter the momentum of her life. This led to many interesting (and squeamish) responses from the students. While this text was an effective way to end the semester, it was only through their perseverance and attention to the earlier articulations from other authors that allowed them such fruitful and relevant inquiry.

In the end, this essay was not intended to extol the virtues of my course as I pilfer many ideas from more experienced instructors. Nor was this essay intended as an argument for some type of eighteenth-century canonicity. I realize that we, as instructors, suffer from similar issues and that we are constantly adapting to the needs of our students. Ultimately, my goal as a professor of eighteenth-century Literature is not only to provide them a "representation" of the period, but also to show them why it is I fell in love with the period in the first place. To this end, I have found in the streets of eighteenth-century London a pedagogy that replicates the fear and excitement outlined in Bancks' poem, the "loss" as evidenced by Pepys and Evelyn, and the liberation of Fanny's sexual life. For my students, like Fanny, they "passed thro' the greatest streets," they heard "the noise of the coaches," and felt "the hurry, the crowds of foot passengers." For them, as it was for Fanny, "the new scenery of the shops and houses at once pleased and amazed" (4).

Notes

[1] When Charles II regained the throne the maximum number of printers was 20. By the 1720s there were 75 master printers in London and by 1761 there were more than 120.

[2] The Habermasian formulation of the bourgeois public sphere in the eighteenth century has been heavily revised, and for good reason. We are now able to assert with some certainty that the public and private spheres were not mutually exclusive categories and, in fact, that the "public and private intertwine, and public life is sustained by private affiliations and alliances that to modern eyes look scandalous or corrupt" (Richetti 117). For Habermas, the emergence of the public sphere is dependent on private individuals who, because of their economic power come together "to form a new sort of public" (115) interested in revising the ways of the absolutist state. Habermas explains that this is done in two ways: "veritas non auctoritas facit legem (truth and not authority is the source of law" (Habermas 53) and "A political consciousness developed in the public sphere of civil society which, in opposition to absolute sovereignty, articulated the concept of and demand for general and abstract laws and which ultimately came to assert itself (i.e., public opinion) as the only legitimate source of this law" (54). Hence, in this formulation law is conceived as "permanent and universal norms rather than as an imposition by the sovereign" (Richetti 115) and the truth can only be found through rational argument in open and public debate. This sphere includes private individuals who share a desire to debate in public the ways to regulate the private sphere. Thus, "the two spheres are crucially linked, as a redefined private sphere leads to a correspondingly revised public reality" (115). The two spheres exist in a cyclical relationship in which private individuals publicly meet to redefine their private lives.

This overview is not especially unique but is especially compelling when we configure it with the main critique that "Habermas neglect[ed] all those who were excluded in the public domain: the underclass and women" (Olson 152). While Habermas may have neglected to mention those excluded from the public sphere, he did ask a very important question about these neglected classes: "But how much, and how correctly, would we think if we did not think as it were in common with others, with whom we mutually communicate" (104). Of course, women and the underclass often did not think in common with those who had economic power and a voice in the public sphere. Of course, the "deviant" was "voiceless" in the public sphere as well. To say that the "deviant" did not think in common with the voices of the public sphere would be a drastic understatement. The "deviant" was often antithetical to various normative ideologies that underpinned both the public and private spheres. While rarely given a voice in the public sphere, the neglected and underrepresented did have a place in the public sphere. As Habermas points out, "The Law of Opinion judged virtues and vices; virtue, indeed, was measured precisely in terms of public esteem" (91). "'Opinion' denoted the informal web of folkways whose indirect social control was more effective than the formal censure under threat of ecclesiastical or governmental sanctions" (91).

[3] For more on John Gay's Trivia; or the Art of Walking the Street, see Erik Bond's extremely thorough account *Reading London: Urban Speculation and Imaginative Government in Eighteenth-Century Literature*. Bond argues that, "Gay's poem offers a variety of ways for readers to identify their position in London, which in Gay's terms means a position among a moral hierarchy of professions as well as among buildings and streets" (31). Through the

concept of "conduct," Bond asserts that Gay "yok[es] morality to geography" in order to produce a "mental map for readers on the go" (34-35). For Bond, Gay's text is a highly moral approach to walking the streets of London in which the reader is responsible both for their ability to read the city and their ability to write the city.

[4] For more on Daniel Defoe's urban characters and urban identity, see Simon Varey *Space and the Eighteenth-Century English Novel*. For Varey, "This isolation and alienation of Defoe's principal characters are imagined spatially: in *Moll Flanders* and *Colonel Jack* the spaces of the city are important in spite of their notorious lack of specificity, because they enable a subject in a discourse of power to establish her or his own subjectivity and so overcome the least desirable consequences of their alienation. In *Moll Flanders*, according to Varey, "Moll reminds us that self-protection lies in other people's ignorance of both their identity and the space she occupies" (143). Varey, along with other scholars such as Dorothy Van Ghent, Max Byrd, and George Starr, all point to a "paucity of visual detail" (Starr xx) and an urban detail that is "not at all vivid in texture" (Van Ghent 34-35). I agree with Cynthia Wall that "we need to recognize a different cultural perception of space in the early eighteenth century as the source of its different textual representation—that we should not expect Defoe and other early novelists to furnish us with Dickensian detail. But neither should we miss the presence and resonance of the novelistic spatial detail that does exist simply because we might be expecting something else, something less 'other'" (215).

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